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FRIDAY, MAY 27, 1898.

CONTENTS:

<i>On the Genetic Energy of Organisms:</i> PROFESSOR HENRY SHALER WILLIAMS.....	721
<i>The Measurement of Small Gaseous Pressures:</i> CHARLES F. BRUSH.....	730
<i>Some Thoughts concerning the Teaching of Chemistry:</i> PROFESSOR W. P. MASON.....	734
<i>Professor Schenck's Researches on the Predetermination of Sex.....</i>	736
<i>Conversazione of the Royal Society.....</i>	738
<i>Zoological Society of London</i>	741
<i>Current Notes on Anthropology:—</i>	
<i>Primitive Musical Instruments; Pre-Columbian Leprosy in America: The Throwing Stick in America:</i> PROFESSOR D. G. BRINTON	742
<i>Notes on Inorganic Chemistry:</i> J. L. H.....	743
<i>Scientific Notes and News:—</i>	
<i>The Rumford Medal; The Coming Meeting of the British Association at Bristol; Liquid Hydrogen; General.....</i>	744
<i>University and Educational News.....</i>	747
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:—</i>	
<i>Spiritualism as a Survival:</i> PROFESSOR EDWARD S. MORSE. 'The New Psychology:' DR. E. W. SCRIPTURE. <i>Fulgur perversum at Avalon, N. J.:</i> LEWIS WOOLMAN. <i>The Definition of Species:</i> PROFESSOR J. MCKEEN CATTELL.....	749
<i>Scientific Literature:—</i>	
<i>Thaxter's Monograph of the Laboulbeniaceæ</i> PROFESSOR GEO. F. ATKINSON. <i>Agricultural Experiment Stations:</i> T. D. A. COCKERELL. <i>Il Codice Atlantico di Leonardo da Vinci:</i> PROFESSOR R. H. THURSTON	752

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ON THE GENETIC ENERGY OF ORGANISMS.*

For several years the conviction has been growing more and more definite in my mind that the fundamental principle in vital phenomena is to be found in variation rather than in heredity. The first time this opinion was definitely expressed in print was in 'Geological Biology' (1894): "Variability is thus assumed to be an inherent characteristic of all organisms, and origin of species has primarily to consider how comparative permanency of characters, and of different sets of characters in different lines of descent, is brought about" (p. 184); and: "The search has been for some cause of variation; it is more probable that mutability is the normal law of organic action, and that permanency is the acquired law," etc. (p. 297). Two years later Professor L. H. Bailey said in his 'The Survival of the Unlike' (1896): "In other words, I look upon heredity as an acquired character, the same as form or color or sensation is, and not as an original endowment of matter" (p. 23). Perhaps others have published the same conclusion, but, if so, I have not elsewhere seen the point advanced as a scientific proposition.

The conviction was reached on my part through studies in paleontology. As early as 1881 I was struck by the evidence of a

* A paper read before the American Society of Naturalists, December 24, 1897, by Henry Shaler Williams, Yale College, New Haven, Conn.